

An Ear to the Ground

By Walt Bones, South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture

CHEERS

Thursday, December 13, 2012

It seems that our Holiday Season has been commandeered by the “Fiscal Cliff” discussions in Washington, DC. I’m not sure who “Cliff” is but judging by the rhetoric I hear, they must be referencing Cliff Clavin the infamous know-it-all from the “Cheers” program. He always had this penchant for coming up with some of the most obscure facts at the most (in)opportune moment. He may have not been fast enough on the buzzer for the “Jeopardy” show, but he surely was armed with a plethora of facts, figures, and numbers.



I think the discussion is really simple and the answer is one that our State and our farmers and ranchers have figured out a long time ago . . . you can't spend more than you earn. No credible lending institution would allow us to spend 140 percent of what we earn while we try to manage 640% of our annual earnings hanging over us as outstanding debt. This pattern is not sustainable.

I appreciate the efforts of our Senate and House Agriculture committees. Even though we have not come up with total consensus, they have streamlined some programs, eliminated others and proposed millions of dollars in cost saving cuts that will provide for an adequate level of funding. Our forefathers taught us a long time ago that tough decisions must be made in tough times. If all the other Departments in Washington, DC exerted the same effort and diligence, I think the discussion would be totally different. But, since the percentage of the Federal Budget that goes to support production agriculture and conservation is only one half of one percent, our overall impact though admirable, is fairly minimal.

Agriculture is the rock that provides a firm foundation for not only the State of South Dakota, but for our country as well. That rock is made out of our farmers and ranchers that take care of business, the land, their livestock, the wildlife, and the environment.

I am eternally grateful, humbled, and honored to serve as your Secretary of Agriculture. As we turn the calendar from 2012 to 2013, I thank you for all you do and wish you a blessed Holiday!

Walt